



CSTPV



Journal of Terrorism Research

Volume 2, Issue 1

Justin Gest. *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West*. London, Hurst & Company, 2010. Cloth, 256 pages, ISBN: 978-0-231-70188-4, \$35.00 Reviewed by Alison McConnell, Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO), Gulu, Uganda

Apart examines the differences between young European Muslims that operate within the democratic system and those that actively oppose it or withdraw completely. Gest finds traditional Structuralist accounts of alienation and engagement insufficient for two reasons. First, sociological conditions have evolved since these accounts were created; and second, these accounts fail to explain different methods of engagement from people of similar socio-economic statuses.

To fill this void, Gest puts forth a new model which differentiates between those that actively engage with the democratic system and those that he refers to as anti-system. "To put it simply, anti-system behavior entails the belief that the democratic society and the referent individual no longer hold convergent interests- I call this belief 'apartism'" (Gest, 2010:64). Gest divides anti-system behavior into two types of engagement: active and passive. Active anti-system behavior is aimed at defeating the existing system while passive anti-system behavior involves a complete rejection or withdrawal from the existing system.

To test his model and examine the differences between individuals and their method of engagement, Gest compares two case studies based on over 100 interviews. The first case study is the Bangladeshi community in London's East End and the second case study is the Moroccan community in and around Lavapies, Madrid. Strengths of Gest's work include his in-depth analysis of both cases and his extensive methodology section which outlines and addresses all possible weaknesses and limitations of the study.

Gest concludes that the main differentiating factor between those that are anti-system and those that actively engage is perception. "...I find that what distinguishes democratic activists from both forms of anti-system behavior is the nature of their individual expectations and perceptions about shared socio-political realities" (Gest, 2010:178). Perception includes their expectation of the government, whether these expectations are attained and any discrepancy between expectation and attainment. This perception/discrepancy argument is similar to the argument made by Gurr in his book *Why Men Rebel*. However, in *Apart*, Gest applies this argument to individual activism more generally rather than solely to violent action.



CSTPV



Journal of Terrorism Research

Volume 2, Issue 1

The book could have benefited from clarifying the difference between violent and non-violent active anti-system behavior. Or, if Gest believes that active anti-system behavior inherently involves violence, then this assumption needs to be clearly stated. Often, as we see with the concepts of radicalization and extremism, this difference is not emphasized despite being an important one.

Overall, *Apart* is a well written book whose findings have important policy implications for current counter-terrorism initiatives in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Indeed, from the results of this study, we see that the best way to predict the political behavior of individuals is to understand the way they interpret the world and its challenges. And worldviews are simply not demarcated physically. In fact, it is arguable that physical profiling does significantly more harm than good (Gest, 2010:219).

Arguments such as these, concerning the effectiveness of counter terrorism policy and physical profiling are not unique. What makes Gest's work stand *APART* is his level of qualitative analysis, his theoretical model and his call for counter terrorism policy makers to measure "...the security effect of eliminating or mitigating those policies that most damage Muslim citizens' faith in the political system"(Gest, 2010:219). Gest argues "[i]t is possible that the marginal increase in vulnerability is microscopic if other more effective policies are left subtly in place" (Gest, 2010:219).
